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Child and Family Tip Sheet: Making Connections with Children

University of Montana Rural Institute

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Making Connections with Children



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The rewards for putting time and energy into connecting with a child come back to you in many ways. When children are in a caring environment, they learn to treat one another with care. Positive relationships with children:

- Allow children to thrive. Children need consistent relationships to feel safe and learn about the world around them.
- Allow you to understand the child, their temperament, strengths and needs.
- Provide information for selecting toys and arranging the environment.
- Give a sense of satisfaction as the children grow and learn.

General hints to build relationships with children

Maintain a sense of optimism. Believe children have the desire and the right to be successful.

- Be curious about each child's unique strengths, interests, and needs. Your understanding influences everyday actions such as how to communicate with a child and what activities to plan.
- Be caring and see the child first, even during challenging days and situations.
- Be consistent. Use the same voice tone, response to problems, and degree of warmth from one day to the next.
- Be an effective communicator. Listen more than you speak.
- Be self-reflective. Be aware of your tone of voice, body language, facial expressions, and emotional triggers.



Specific things you can do to build relationships

There are many ways to build relationships and connections with children. Here are a few that fit in the daily routine.

- Greet each child warmly. Get down at the child's level or look into the child's face, and use their name.
- Join a child at play. Quietly ask, "Can I sit by you for a minute while you paint?" and then pay attention.
- Write a short note. "I had fun watching you build castles in the sand box today."
- Follow up on a child's interest. "Yesterday, you told us about your boat. I found this book on boats for us to read together."
- Respond. When you catch yourself ignoring a child or a child's request, don't let the moment pass. Take a deep breath, relax your facial expression, bend or kneel down, and say, "I think you have something to tell me and I want to listen."

The Child Care Plus Center was based at the Rural Institute from 1987 to 2012. The nationally-focused Center supported and promoted inclusive early childhood environments.

Child Care Plus is no longer an active project. However, the materials are still relevant. To address the needs of a broad audience, Rural Institute staff updated several Child Care Plus resources in 2021.

The updated views expressed in this document may not reflect the original Child Care Plus purpose, or the official position of the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities or University of Montana.




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